

A Comedy of Errors to Cape Town

by Lacey Lewis

A not-so-funny thing happened on the way to South Africa. It was January 31st, 2008, the day I was to depart for my semester abroad at the University of Cape Town. I had spent the entire eve of my expedition extrapolating over what to pack and extracting every item of clothing from my closet. I must have packed, unpacked, and repacked my two allotted seventy pound suitcases at least six times. The suitcase calisthenics consumed the night and nibbled into the wee hours of the morning; I did not sleep a wink.

My flight was scheduled for 11:00 a.m. Since I was an international traveler, I needed to be at the airport two hours before take-off. My mom, twin sister, and I left my house in McKinney, TX at 8:00 a.m. in order to reach the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport by 9:00 a.m. At the airport, the first task was to check in and drop off my luggage. Much to my dismay, though not so unexpected, each of my suitcases was fifteen pounds overweight. Even after much redistribution and removal of shoes, jeans, and toiletries, my suitcases were still overweight. My mom generously shelled out the \$100 fee for the obese bags. "You can take it out my inheritance," I said jokingly to lighten the mood. "What inheritance?" She was not amused.

After hugs, good-byes, and farewell pictures, I passed through security and awaited my plane at the gate. Feelings of excitement, fear, faith, and emerging independence whirled inside of me. I was about to fly alone for the first time, to a country where I knew no one, to live with people I had never met, and study abroad at a university where no other Ouachita student had studied. I knew an extraordinary experience was to come. My plane arrived a few moments later. With laptop in tow and boarding pass in hand, I boarded the plane.

Two hours later I arrived at Dulles International Airport in Washington, D.C. and stepped off the plane with a new sense of independence. I located my gate, treated myself to an ice latte, and made myself comfortable at the gate until boarding time. I did not realize that I had to take a shuttle from that gate to another gate in order to get to my plane. The clerk at the gate informed me of this and I reached the shuttle just in time. On the shuttle I was fortunate to sit down next to a guy who was also destined for a semester abroad in Cape Town. A history major, music fanatic, and amateur banjo player, Ben and I found much to talk about. We even discovered that we would be taking an African music class together at UCT. The shuttle arrived at the gate and we boarded the plane. Ben and I parted ways for the duration of the flight.

The excitement, caffeine, and endless stream of movies kept me awake throughout the entire flight. I occasionally peeked out the window to see the dark Atlantic below. After what seemed like days, we landed in Johannesburg. I exited the plane and entered the Johannesburg airport feeling more independent than ever. "I am in Africa," I thought excitedly. I had a couple hours to pick up my luggage, go through customs, and check my luggage before my flight from Johannesburg to Cape Town.

I met up with Ben at luggage pick-up. We made casual conversation as we watched streams of suitcases spin around the carousel. I always get nervous when waiting for my luggage after a flight. I always have this fear that my belongings will get left behind, stolen by gypsies, or fall out into the ocean and get eaten by sharks. Maybe it is just one of my irrational fears. Well, it was not so irrational this time. There were no more suitcases left on the carousel and Ben and I still did not have our bags. Our luggage was lost! It turns out that South African Airways was experiencing problems with their loading company, the people who load luggage and cargo onto planes. On

that particular day, South African Airways' original loading company was on strike and a lawsuit was in progress. As a result of the shortage in loaders, mine and Ben's luggage was left behind. Ben and I quickly filled out some forms at luggage services, passed through customs, and set out to find our gate. We climbed stairs and escalators, dodged other travelers, and skid through food courts to get to security. We had five minutes to pass through security, find our gate, and board the plane. The line to pass through security was at least a mile long. Fortunately the security officers let us pass to the front of the line. We quickly passed through and found our gate only to find that our plane was delayed. Our plane finally arrived an hour later. Cape Town here we come.

The flight from Johannesburg to Cape Town was short and sweet. All of the American study abroad students were greeted by UCT students in bright green shirts. Those of us with missing bags filled out some forms at luggage services, praying that we would see them again. We then boarded the shuttle that would take us to our respective homes. As we drove around the city we noticed that the residential streets were very dark. We were informed that the electricity was out for Cape Town's southern suburbs and would be for a few hours.

An hour later we came to my house on 79 Albion Road. The driver gave me a tiny tea light candle to light my way. I was greeted by one of my new housemates, Derek, a law student from California. He unlocked the three doors that separated the house from the crime ridden streets to let me inside. My tea light quickly burned out. I found my room and tried to imagine what it looked like in the light. With no luggage to unpack, there was not much I could do. I took off my shoes and tried to get some sleep. As sleep proved prodigal, I went to the window to gaze at the South African sky. No luggage. No lights. Welcome to Cape Town.